Santa Clara Valley
Milpitas and the Eastern Foothill District

By Ira B. McMahill

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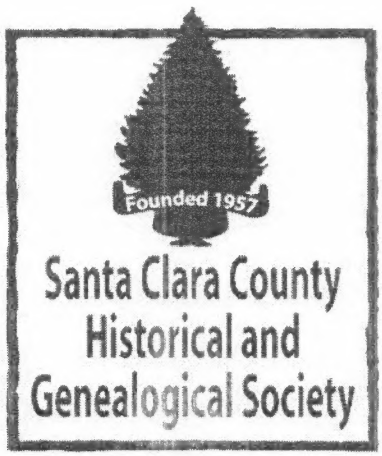
Notes:

- Original in possession of the Santa Clara County Archives, San Jose, California
- Scanned by the Santa Clara Historical and Genealogical Society



American Guide
District #9
Ira B. McMahill

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SANTA CLARA VALLEY

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"As goes Milpitas, so goes the State of California". This declaration of those watching election returns was famed for many years. Just how it came about is theoretical but perhaps it was because the little village, never an incorporated municipality, had a very wideawake and determined set of citizens always taking great interest in elections and the precinct had a trained election board which prided itself in making the count and getting the returns into the county seat at San Jose in record time. These returns went out over the press wires and, strange to say, almost always indicated how California would go for Governor and other state officials and often, as well, for President.

The name "Milpitas" is termed a "puzzle" among California names but is held most likely to mean "Little Gardens" and to have originated from the word "milpa" (Spanish-Indian) and that meant a corn patch. This is held to be quite true because of the productivness of the surrounding section and closeness to the missions of Santa Clara and San Jose for it was usual to have the mission gardens at some little distance from the missions proper.

The east side of the Santa Clara valley, in its sweep from the heights of the Mt. Hamilton range, down to the lower foothills and the valley floor and from the Evergreen section on the south, through the Berryessa, the Milpitas section and on to Warm Springs, which is another little place on the line between Alameda and Santa Clara counties, has been noted since cultivation began in the valley, for producing the earliest and finest of fruits of all kinds, vegetables and cereals, for fine grazing lands, dairying and stock raising.

Climatic conditions favor the east side of the valley for early in the season when heavy frosts fall and the morning's sun comes up over the Mt. Hamilton range, the sun-rays strike the west side of the valley first, then the lower valley,

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and in case of heavy frost vegetation in the last sections named wilts and suffers damage, whereas, on the east side the warming up is gradual and little or no damage occurs.

Into the markets of the bay region the Evergreen, Berryessa and Milpitas area sends many thousands of truck loads of all kinds of vegetables of early sweet corn, milk and cream by the thousands of gallons. Peas, onions, beets, celery, asparagus, spinach, potatoes, garlic, string beans, and, of the fruits - grapes, cherries, apricots, prunes, apples come into swell the proofs of the productivity of this portion of the valley.

From 1776 on, when the De Anza party first came into the Santa Clara Valley on its exploration journey toward San Francisco Bay, the founding of the mission Santa Clara and that of Mission San Jose - the one in the valley floor and the other on the heights above, on the east side, the march of development in an intensive way has marked the history of the east side and most especially in earliest cultivation, planting and general farming.

"Evergreen" is just a name but it is fully descriptive of the surroundings of that little hamlet for the hills and the valley always shine with greenery.

"Berryessa" is not a town, it has a small center with a store and garage and the like but the name actually applies to an area of several thousand square acres extending from the upper heights of the Mt. Hamilton range down to the valley floor. Nicholas Antonio and Maria Isabel Berrelleza were of the De Anza party's expedition of 1776 and they settled in the territory given them by Spanish grant and covering what is known as the Berryessa district. The name Berryessa is held to be a corruption of the actual name of these two original

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pioneers whose progeny numbered many and not a few of these children, grandchildren and then on are still residents of the district, or of San Jose and adjacent area. Many of the oldest and greatest of the pioneer families of the valley have been residents of the east side from Evergreen on and have written their names high in the annals of the development of the Santa Clara Valley, of San Jose and of all of the valley towns and villages.

Of these many a few names may be set forth like those of the Schellers, the Coes, the Hobsons, Flickingers, Pyles, Edwards, Zankers, Berryessas, Curtners, Ayers, Balous, Boots, Barbers, O'Tooles, Croples, Snows, Wellers, Bersons, Abels, Balls and the Lakes. Historic indeed are the days when these sturdy pioneers, crossing the plains or landing from around the Horn, came into the Santa Clara valley to lay the foundations of a state and a section which has grown famous throughout America.

Authorities: "Spanish and Indian Place Names of California".
By Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez. 1914, 1922, 1930

Charles A. Ball, W. S. Clayton and other citizens.

"History of Santa Clara Valley" Maj. H. S. Foote

"History of Santa Clara Valley" Eugene T. Sawyer.